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Memory, Metatheater, and Intertextuality in "La Madrugada" by Juan Tovar

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The dramatic portrayal of historical events has been a feature of performative arts throughout Mexican history, from pre-Columbian representations of historical-mythological stories for ritualistic and didactic purposes to the various ways in which contemporary theater engages with the past to speak of the present while questioning previously unassailed historical truth claims. The multifaceted relationship between past and present, as well as history and theater, is explored in Juan Tovar's historical drama *La Madrugada* (premiere 1979, publication 1980). It is the first piece in a historical tetralogy that also includes *El destierro* (1980), *Las adoraciones* (1981) y *La manga de clavo* (written in collaboration with Beatriz Novaro, 1981). *La madrugada* is a reconstruction and retelling of the events that led to the assassination of Francisco "Pancho" Villa in 1923 in Hidalgo del Parral, Chihuahua. Through a structure that jumps temporally and thematically, *La madrugada* offers a reconstruction of the tragic events in order to explore the effects of the loss of the ideals of the Revolution since that time. Essentially a tragedy written in the form of a corrido, the preface indicates how, as a historical play, its preoccupation is as much the past as the present in that "[r]epasar el pasado es repasar el presente. Contamos historias viejas por ir corriendo la nueva, como la máscara nos otorga cara con qué mirarnos a la luz del sol que es otro cada día" (1054). In *La madrugada* the concepts of temporality, memory, and history are presented through the use of metatheatricality within the dramatic text and intertextuality with works such as Rulfo's *Pedro Páramo* and various historical *corridos*. In this analysis the processes through which official history is constructed are shown in contrast with collective memory that endures in the corrido, the "authentic" voice of the people. The lies associated with the assassination of Villa serve as an allegory for a long series of abuses committed by

those that affirm to carry on his ideals, suggesting that the only possibility for redemption is found in popular memory, a space where one can learn from history to rectify the mistakes of the past, mistakes whose impact on politics and society is felt to this day.

Although *La madrugada* centers on the plot against and the assassination of Pancho Villa, the Centauro del Norte is not a primary character, briefly appearing in two of the eleven scenes that make up the play. In his place, the action and dialogue revolve around two groups: the *campesinos* that mourn the loss of their hero and the conspirators who are given a voice through which they justify their participation in Villa's murder. Conscientious of how history is written by the victors, the triggermen and accomplices discuss, albeit erroneously, about how future generations will judge their actions in a positive light. Although given the opportunity to justify their deeds, at the end of the play the conspirators do not find redemption, instead the only possibility of redemption can be found through memory, a space where the people can learn from history in order to correct the mistakes of the past that still impact the present.

To bring the passing of time and the writing of history to the foreground, the play is temporally structured like a Chinese box where identities seem to hold other identities in an endless loop. The actors that play the *campesinos* that cry for the infertile land at the beginning of the work explicitly also play the parts of the historical participants in Villa's assassination. As the action recesses toward the past, three temporal planes are created: the diegetic present of the *campesinos* who speak of the consequences of the attack and loss of Villa, a diegetic past in which the conspirators explain their motives, and lastly a mimetic past in which the public witnesses the tragic events of 1923. The thread that ties together these three distinct planes is the chorus of *campesinos* that sings *corridos* about

the life, death, and memory of their hero, Pancho Villa. As a result, at the same time that the audience gets a glimpse into the distant past, the processes through which history is constructed are made evident, underlining the effects that memory, time, and the necessities of the present have on our interpretation of the past.

Historical theater—whether it approaches its subject with realism or with a more expansive scope—is only impactful when it breathes new life into past events and personages, rendering a new dramatic and active representation of another time. In Mexico, making the past present dramatically or textually compliments a culture where temporal distinctions between past and present are incongruent to perceived reality as observed by Carlos Fuentes who affirms that “la premisa del escritor europeo es la unidad del tiempo lineal, que progresa hacia adelante digiriendo, asimilando pasado. Entre nosotros, en cambio, no hay un solo tiempo: todos los tiempos están vivos, todos los pasados son presentes” (9). According to Fuentes, this coexistence is based partly on cultural cosmovision and partly on political and historical legacies adding that “la paradoja de las promesas en México es que al cumplirse, se destruyen y, al permanecer incumplidas, viven eternamente” (11). The exploration of the unfulfilled promises of the Mexican Revolution, represented in *La Madrugada* through the assassination of Villa, serves as a counterpoint to the official version of history as promoted by state institutions. To represent the past is to take an ideological and political position. Historically in Mexico the representations and interpretations of the past have often been indistinguishable from the dominant political discourse as Enrique Florescano observes “en nuestro país la reconstrucción del pasado se ha vinculado de tal modo a las grandes convulsiones políticas e ideológicas que atraviesan su historia, que cada proyecto político que se ha

presentado a la nación ha tenido como correlato una nueva interpretación y reconstrucción del pasado” (12). Among the various discourses that connect the present with the past, perhaps it is historical theater that best allows us to go beyond traditional historiography to experience anagnorisis along with the historical personages on stage. Luis de Tavira affirms that “sin teatro, sin la representación de la existencia, la historia enmudece y el horizonte se eclipsa” (30). Each time that history is staged the connections between past and present are reaffirmed allowing the audience the possibility of not only examining the sentence of the past but also the possibilities of the future.

By staging the past, the playwright’s task is not that of historiographer but rather that of interpreter and artist. Rodolfo Usigli makes this distinction, coining the term *antihistórico* to describe theater that examines historical events through a more interpretive lens than that of traditional historiography. In his prologue to *Corona de luz* Usigli proposes that “[n]adie puede ser fiel a la vez a Dios y al Diablo. Nadie puede servir a un tiempo al teatro y a la historia. Yo quiero servir al teatro y servir a la historia siguiendo mi criterio de que la historia no es ayer, sino hoy, mañana y siempre” (33). The nexus between past, present, and future is an essential feature of (anti)historical theater as the needs of present determine the focus on and approach to the past.

The subtitle of *La madrugada, corrido de la muerte y atroz asesinato del General Francisco Villa*, effectively communicates Tovar’s approach to this historical moment. Matías Montes-Huidobro remarks that “la adjetivación del subtítulo (“atroz”) apunta a la hipérbole y a una intención distorsionante que se confirma después. La recuperación del nombre (“Francisco”) representa un afán de revalorización en términos objetivos. La referencia a la música típica mexicana (“corrido”) indica integración de lo musical a lo

dramático. El resultado es muy buen teatro” (105). As the action begins, all the actors are on stage and begin to sing a corrido titled “Canción de la tierra” in which the land is described as dry, thirsty, and without life:

El cielo es el aire azul / La tierra, negra condena
El mar es morir de sed / Morirse de hambre, la tierra
Dame al olvido / borra mi huella
pierde mi nombre / échame tierra
La vida se va quedando / plantada en la sementera
La raíz no se asienta firme / ni se levanta cosecha
Dame al olvido / borra mi huella
pierde mi nombre / échame tierra [. . .] (1055)

Connecting the land with death and memory, the first corrido of the work underscores that these themes—more than simply testimony of the past—are sources of life. In *La madrugada* the tragic destiny of Pancho Villa is the cause of the barrenness of the land which continues to be projected into the present given that in the work death is the consequence of not remembering the past. Ludwik Margules observes this connection between the role of memory, the lack of action, and classic tragedy positing that in *La Madrugada*, “[c]omo en la tragedia griega, el hombre se encuentra solo ante la implacable bóveda del universo, queda suspendido en el aire del tiempo estancado, o llega a su destrucción física por haber nacido en México, en esta tierra que ha olvidado su memoria” (1039). The world that the characters sing of in the first scene is a present threatened not only by an external force but also by a lack of memory that creates a static present almost without life. The intertextual parallel between the land in *La madrugada* and the Comala

of the narrative present in *Pedro Páramo* is not by chance. Margules recalls that “alguna vez dijo Tovar: ‘Yo quisiera llegar por aquí al relato puro y simple: escribir una novela que a Rulfo le habría gustado, un cuento sin más canto que el natural del coloquio’. Más que en prosa, este anhelo se materializó en la escritura dramática; ante todo, en *La madrugada*, de hecho un homenaje a Juan Rulfo” (1048). In both works, an idyllic past with fertile land is transformed into a lifeless, barren present because of individual vengeance that reaches beyond its intended target and destroys a community. This thematic and symbolic link between texts indicates more than the conventional idea of influence or tribute to a master work. As Jonathan Culler observes, to bring intertextuality to the foreground is “to allude to the paradoxical nature of discursive systems. Discursive conventions can only originate in discourse; everything in *la langue*, as Saussure says, must have first been in *parole*. But parole is made possible by la langue, and if one attempts to identify any utterance or text as a moment of origin one finds that they depend upon prior codes” (113).

In the preface to the play Tovar speaks of the vital role of collective memory in the tragic death of Villa with whom also died the ideals of the Revolution. According to Tovar, the tragedy in this work and in Mexican history is that:

La Revolución no murió de muerte natural. La mataron a mansalva, y la embalsamaron con tan mala maña que ya es pura pudrición. Y todavía su alma en pena alumbra la noche de los corazones. Cada generación trae su nostalgia de ese momento en que la tierra se quiso libre y jugó el todo por el todo. Y es que, por mismo, el juego sigue, el ansia soterrada, la guardia de claro en claro, el revire del albur. (1054)

As he speaks of the end of Pancho Villa and the Revolution, Tovar's words suggest a lack of overall finality and brings to mind how collective memory connects the past to the present. Jacques LeGoff observes the role of collective memory in the formation of history, or to be precise in one form of history in that there are "least two histories: that of collective memory and that of historians. The first appears as essentially mythic, deformed, and anachronistic. But it constitutes the lived reality of the never-completed relation between present and past" (111). Although the tragic destiny has been fulfilled, justice has not been served and, as a result, dishonesty and tragedy continue taking life out of the present. Margules observes that in *La madrugada* "el verdadero tema de la tragedia es el análisis del tiempo de la mentira, contrapuesto al tiempo de la espera de la justicia. Los tres personajes centrales son la tierra, el tiempo y la historia de la Revolución mexicana, que conforma el presente visto como una pesadilla" (1049). In order to reinforce the importance of the "tiempo de la mentira" of the conspirators and the time of the eternal wait for justice for a people that suffer, the actors change roles as the action jumps between the present, near past, and distant past. Montes-Huidobro observes that in one production of the play, "el lúgubre corrido que empieza la obra, ejecutado con estupendo ritmo funeral, se aviva mediante una acción múltiple que logra desplazarse rápidamente de un lugar a otro evitando que el interés decaiga. La constante del cambio hace que una obra, cuyo valor reside en la acción y no en ningún trazado psicológico, pueda mantenerse vivamente en escena" (105-06). The constant in this scenic game is the omnipresent chorus that guides the public through the temporal and thematic back and forth.

This movement is made manifest when, after singing the first corrido of the play, in the following scene many of the actors transform into *campesinos* that lament the current situation, struggling to survive on a dead land. After so many years they have lost hope that the promises of new technologies will bring life to their infertile fields. The sacrifice made by the people during the Revolution has not borne fruit; on the contrary, the ideals for which they struggled have withered much like the communal *maíz*. Describing themselves as “hijos del maíz, pero huérfanos” (1057), the *campesinos* have no choice but to console themselves through shared suffering made art in the corrido.

HOMBRE 1: Échense un trago. A ver, tú, tócate algo bonito. Cántanos de la revolución.

HOMBRE 4: ¿Cuál revolución?

HOMBRE 1: Cómo cuál. La única, la que nos dio la tierra.

HOMBRE 3: Y se quedó con la tienda y la raya. (1058)

Disgusted by the words of Hombre 1, who plays the role of *delegado municipal*, the *campesinos* ask that someone play “Tumba de Villa,” to lament the loss of their hero and, with him, their hopes. While the first chords begin to play, a number of the *campesinos* again transform into a type of Greek chorus that sings of the death of the hero. From this moment on the chorus serves as a type of temporal and thematic anchor, commenting on and describing the events of the past and their consequences in the present. Reminding the public of the violent end of Villa, the chorus sings:

Bajo una lluvia de plomo

Tu vida vino a acabar

Una mañana en julio

En Hidalgo de Parral

Vamos haciendo memoria

Vamos contando la historia (1060)

The chorus of corrido, “Vamos haciendo memoria / Vamos contando la historia,” makes evident the contrast between the dry, thirsty earth that the *campesinos* lament and the ideals of the Revolution that died that day in Parral. The chorus makes present the fact that the present condition of the land is not its natural state. The people suffer for a reason. By “making memory” the chorus calls attention to the processes through which they have arrived at their current reality. In his study on historical theater, Freddie Rokem affirms that the power of this theater is that

history can be performed, in the world and on the theatrical stage too, when different structures of time (besides the daily reappearance of the sun), can be distinguished, making it possible to ask not only if the things that appear again are natural phenomena but if they are triggered by some kind of agency, creating a pattern, not just mechanical repetition. (xi)

In *La madrugada* the illusion of naturality of how the past is represented is shattered, reminding the public that much like the infertile land, the present is not a natural state but rather a consequence of the lack of action and justice in the past which continues to extend into the present.

In addition to connecting figurative death with the lack of authentic memory, in this scene a door is opened to the second narrative and temporal plane of *La Madrugada*, a diegetic past where the conspirators talk about their participation in the ambush that took Villa's life. At the conclusion of the previous corrido, many of the same *campesinos* that

cry because of the unjust death of Villa now play the roles of the conspirators. This deliberately metatheatrical metamorphosis forces the audience to ask themselves not only who the conspirators are but also why they assassinated Villa. This disruption of the illusion of naturalness is an example of metatheatrical works that, according to Lionel Abel, are “pieces about life seen as already theatricalized. By this I mean that the persons appearing on the stage in these plays are there not simply because they were caught by the playwright in dramatic postures as a camera might catch them, but because they themselves knew they were dramatic before the playwright took note of them” (60). In *La Madrugada*, by planting this awareness, this seed of doubt, history as it has been previously transmitted begins to be questioned opening the space for collective memory. According to Fernando Aínsa

[t]odo discurso histórico (historiográfico o ficcional) es, ante todo, memoria del pasado en el presente. A través del proceso de interacción y diálogo entre el presente y el pasado, en el “va y ven” de un tiempo al otro que toda narración histórica propicia, se establece una relación coherente entre ambos, un sentido histórico de pertenencia orgánica a un proceso colectivo, local, nacional o regional. (67)

When history becomes representation in this first plane of the play, the tension between official history and collective/popular memory is made manifest.

In the second temporal plane of the play the conspirators discuss how and why they decided to carry out the assassination. Melitón Lozoya, one of the intellectual authors of the attack, questions how Villa assumed his power: “Dizque Francisco Villa, dizque general. Yo lo conocí cuando se llamaba Doroteo Arango y vivía de robar vacas. Y luego

se encumbró en la bola y le dieron su hacienda, así y todo siguió siendo bandido” (1061). Lozoya shares with the other conspirators the personal vengeance that tinges his words with a palpable rancor. Besides the chorus, these are the only voices heard on stage, giving the conspirators the space necessary to demonstrate that their plan is an act of justice. In this moment the plot is still being hatched; not all are sure if it is necessary to actually kill Villa. While many speak of how the general has killed their loved ones, one of the future conspirators reminds them, “¿a quién no le mataron a alguien en la bola?” (1062). Nonetheless, as the insults and abuses committed by Villa are recounted and begin to accumulate the conspirators all arrive at the same conclusion that Villa must be killed.

Once the conspiracy is decided, the men stand and leave the stage to a corrido whose words communicate the uncertainty and doubt behind the superficial conviction that they exhibited just moments before:

Doroteo Arango, maldito
que te he de matar mañana
No sé si es que me ofendiste
o si lo hago por la paga
Todo viene a dar lo mismo
si de echar bala se trata (1065)

The verses of this corrido sung from the perspective of the conspirators stand in contrast to those of the first song of the play whose words represent the thoughts and hopes of the people. Although in the beginning of the play all the actors sing in unison, now the divisions between the people and the conspirators become marked in a way that

reconciliation becomes an impossibility. The multiplicity of voices underscores the dialogic nature of the play, a process that Féral explores in the general context of historical theater in Latin America:

Estas memorias múltiples, presentes en toda representación, se confrontan entre sí y establecen relaciones dialécticas, no solamente en el transcurso del trabajo preliminar que da origen al espectáculo, sino también durante la representación misma y la recepción del público. La memoria del teatro se sitúa entre lo subjetivo y lo colectivo, en el cruce de una fenomenología de la conciencia subjetiva y de una sociología de una memoria colectiva. (15)

In the following scene the rhythm of the action decreases while the conspirators speak of waiting for the perfect moment to exact their revenge. During this scene in the play the audience hears the men's thoughts—at times profound, at times banal—which creates an effect of tedious waiting. Margules affirms that “en esta tragedia-corrido todos esperan: los asesinos esperan para matar a Villa, las largas manos del poder del centro esperan la tan ansiada noticia del asesinato; los campesinos convertidos en un patético coro griego, esperan hasta el fin de los tiempos que se les haga justicia” (1047). This stagnant time underlines the lack of activity given that all of the conspirators' energy is dedicated to carrying out the assassination which directly has its corollary in the lack of productivity that the *campesinos* lament throughout the play. The plotters are incessantly obsessed with how history will judge what they are destined to do that day in Parral. Jesús Salas Barraza, the general and congressman in Durango who after the attack comes forward and confesses himself to be the sole assassin, speaks with Gabriel Chávez about

how to present his case to the public. Reading from his confessions scrawled on a crumpled-up piece of paper, Salas rehearses his almost poetic lines saying.

Estos crímenes, pálidos reflejos de lo que fue capaz esta alma sanguinaria nacida para el mal, demostrarán de una manera palpable e irrefutable que todo hombre honrado y de corazón bien puesto, tenía que ser agitado por la mano vengadora de una justicia tardía en castigar a tan feroz criminal.
(1066)

Encouraged by the idea of presenting the assassination as an act of justice, his co-conspirator replies, “debo decirle, compañero, que si antes lo estimaba, ahora lo admiro. Este documento pasará a la historia como un ejemplo de hombría y patriotismo” (1066), and even goes as far as to add that he is impressed with “su estilo, también; tiene brío” (1066).

Completely conscientious of how to manipulate public memory through discourse, Chávez advises him that “mejor evitar las precisiones. Exoteria, mi amigo, sólo exoteria. Mucho hincapié en la patria. La patria es una idea a la medida de la chusma. Es la virgencita, la madrecita que les tara sus asuntos con el padre. De él no conocen nada y más vale así” (1067). That is to say that the formalisms and rhetorical justifications in the document already begin to assume more importance than the reality that inspired them. When Salas admits that sometimes he doubts that he can carry out his mission, Chávez reminds him that “cada vez que lo atraiga al vacío, Jesús, relea lo que usted mismo ha escrito. Así podrá mantenerse de continuo a la altura de su papel” (1067). Because Salas is writing history before it has even occurred, the public is reminded of the dissonance between what truly occurred and the process through which history is written.

The majority of the action in *La madrugada* happens in the two dramatic levels previously described: the present of the *campesinos* and the past in which the plotters speak of why they believe Villa must die. It is only toward the end of the performance when the third dramatic level is introduced where Villa appears on stage oblivious to what the audience already knows. The subtitle of the play would suggest to spectators that they will witness the “atroz asesinato” of Francisco Villa only to have them be submitted to the same tedious and anxiety-provoking wait of the conspirators on stage. As the tension builds and builds, the perspective finally shifts to that of Pancho Villa.

Curiously, the two scenes that feature Villa have an almost oneiric quality where it is difficult to distinguish between reality and the prophetic nightmares about his death. The scene titled “Sueño” begins with a corrido whose words emphasize the Centauro del Norte’s tragic fate:

Dicen que Francisco Villa
escuchó la voz de Dios
que le cantaba al oído
y le daba esta razón
Vente yendo al camposanto
para hacerme compañía
porque aquí el sol ni calienta
y la noche es lluvia fría (1073)

Upon entering the scene, Luz embraces Villa and tells him about her dream in which a group of men attack him on a bridge. Historically speaking, María Luz Corral was estranged from her legal husband and at the time of the assassination was banished from

the home that Villa shared with one of his many de facto spouses, Austreberta Rentería. It is not clear if Tovar erred in writing this scene or whether it further highlights an attempt to portray Villa in a generally positive light. What is clear is that Villa's reaction to Luz's nightmare is a mix of pride and fatalism. Villa tells her, "no le dé alas al miedo, que es capaz de remontarse con todo y uno en el pico. Hay que ser fuerte, madrecita, hasta soñando" (1074). Incapable of being able to truly contemplate his mortality, Villa rests his head in Luz's lap where he, and the spectators along with him, enter into a dream inside of a dream where various *campesinos* muse about the rumors that the famous Pancho Villa will once again arise to defend the poor and humble. Villa approaches them and, blinded by his sense of astonishment, does not realize that one of the *campesinos* has turned into Jesús Salas who becomes the captain of a firing squad that will take his life. Montes-Huidobro describes one staging of the play and how this scene in particular recalls a well-known work of art. "Toda la representación tiene un carácter brechtiano-goyesco, enriquecido con elementos simbólicos, como el momento en que Villa tiene la pesadilla y queda ante un paredón de fusilamiento que evoca el 'Dos de mayo' de Goya" (106). Although he awakens terrified, Villa does not hesitate to go back out into the world. Ignoring the premonitions of his wife and his own dream, both the protagonist as well as antagonists in this tragedy must fulfill their fate.

In contrast with the dynamism of the scene of Pancho Villa's dream, the following sequence retakes the motif of the seemingly eternal wait of the plotters who have begun to argue among themselves under the pressure and weight of the undertaking. During this waiting period, called "beckettiana" by Margules (1047), the men talk of banalities, smoke marijuana, and boast about who is the most macho among them, shedding light

on the absurdity with which Tovar chooses to portray them. In their conversations “[l]a crueldad se mezcla con el sentimentalismo paternalista, la cursilería con la violencia. Y por encima de todo, se siente poderosamente el insoportable, esperpéntico sarcasmo burlón del autor” (Margules 1048). This mocking tone abruptly shifts once the men are shaken into action by the infamous signal of a man holding up his hat shouting “¡Viva Villa!” Immediately they open fire over the audience from a position on stage, hesitate a moment, and then begin to celebrate their mission accomplished. Even though this is the moment that both the conspirators and the audience have been waiting for, it is noteworthy that Villa is not even seen on stage, indicating that the action is less concerned with the ambush in and of itself but rather with the injustices committed before and after the assassination. Furthermore, in comparison with the previous scenes, the attack only lasts for a few seconds. Immediately, the flow of the play continues, pointing to a lack of resolution and closure. Instead of lowering the curtain with Villa’s tragic end in the instant after the shootout the action returns back to the conspirators.

While the tension that accompanied the wait vanishes, all of the conspirators, except Román Guerra who was killed in the return fire, run among the audience shooting into the air in celebration. This spatial movement brings special attention to the presence of the conspirators as being among and from the people. Guerra’s brother, José, leans over his body and in an almost melodramatic fashion weeps, “Román, Román. ¿Qué tienes, hermanito? ¡Válgame, si resuellas por la herida! Espérate, yo te ayudo [. . .] Yo haré decir misas por ti, hermanito, y en tu nombre le pondré cirios de los gordos a la Virgen; en eso voy a emplear tu dinero. Mientras ahí te dejo esto, pa que menos te conozcan” (1088). After delivering these lines, the stage directions indicate that José “le

da un culetazo en el rostro. Sale como los otros” (1088). Although the work primarily takes up Villa’s assassination, this is the only act of physical violence witnessed on stage provoking an entirely different reaction to that of the bullets shot over the spectators’ heads. The naturalness with which José puts his brother out of his misery while silencing a possible suspect illustrates to what point the conspirators are willing to hide their motives and true identities.

The cruelty of the plotters reaches a critical point in the penultimate scene titled “Las letanías” which opens with the funeral of Villa where Salas and Chávez mock the dead general. “Ahí te quedas [. . .] ahí te pudres. ¿Qué dices ahora de cómo se administra aquí la revolución?” (1089). The directions indicate that in this scene “Chávez y Salas, como Obregón y Calles cierran la marcha” (1089). It is known that Villa’s closest confidants could not attend his funeral as they were in a standoff with government forces at Canutillo. Hidden for many years behind rumors and insinuation, the true sequence of events and motivations leading to the Villa’s death have been the subject historical research for decades. It is not by chance that the official presidential website of Vicente Fox, the first opposition party head of state since the election of Madero, dedicates a section of the “Sabías que...” feature to the assassination of Villa where it is described that “aunque el complot tenía carácter local y personal, . . . el plan fue conocido en la ciudad de México por el presidente Obregón y el futuro candidato presidencial Plutarco Elías Calles. Ambos escucharon atentamente a lo que intentarían hacer Melitón Lozoya y sus compañeros, y aunque no dejó de sorprenderles, nada hicieron para evitarlo” (Rosas). This connection, popularly known since the 1920s yet denied by those involved for decades, is made evident in *La Madrugada* when at Villa’s funeral, Chávez, aware of

how history is written declares, “ahí te haces historia. Figurarán en los anales tu nombre y tus hazañas, te quemaremos incienso, invocaremos tu protección, te alzaremos monumentos” (1090). Salas adds that “serás, en fin, de los nuestros” to which the chorus reminds the audience sardonically that “no hay mal que por bien no venga” (1090). This commentary by the chorus accentuates the fact that while the death of Villa is in itself tragic, the true tragedy is how the same killers that took Villa’s life will also attempt to alter his memory for their benefit.

The processes through which the post-revolutionary government manipulated and mystified the recent past are documented by Enrique Florescano who posits that

en la década siguiente al movimiento armado, Obregón y los sucesivos gobernantes iniciaron la mitificación del pasado inmediato [. . .] borrarón las oposiciones que habían separado a Madero de Carranza, y a éste de Obregón, y oscurecieron las más pronunciadas contradicciones que enfrentaron a estos líderes con Villa y Zapata. (132)

The mythification of the revolutionary leaders, often by the same forces responsible for their demise, has been an impediment to a deeper understanding of the end of the armed stage of the Revolution and the establishment of the new institutions that would characterize post-revolutionary Mexico. Likewise, the way in which Tovar represents Salas and Chávez both thematically and spatially connecting them with Obregón and Calles accentuates the betrayal against Villa as an allegory for the death of the ideals of the Revolution.

Once in motion, the post-revolutionary machine exhibits a cruel nature disposing of those that do not serve its purposes. After Chávez and Salas move off stage the only

voice that can be heard is that of the people, closing the circular structure of the play. Mourning the death of Villa in a sort of impromptu *día de muertos* in the present of the *campesinos*, a woman gives out *calaveras* made of sugar to her companions who retell the sad fate of most of the conspirators. The message is clear: in spite of their treachery, nothing has changed, the Revolution has failed:

HOMBRE 2: Muertos van, vivos vienen y seguimos en la mera sementera.

HOMBRE 1: Eternamente en las últimas.

HOMBRE 6: Refundidos, malpagados.

HOMBRE 5: Arrancados, olvidados.

HOMBRE 3: Que si llueve, mojados; que si calor, sudando

HOMBRE 8: ¿Para quién fue la pistola?

HOMBRE 4: Eso no me contaron [. . .]

HOMBRE 8: No hay esperanza de nada.

HOMBRE 7: Estamos tocando fondo.

HOMBRE 6: Va a haber otro Zapata que venga o va a haber otra cosa.

HOMBRE 2: Si Villa no hubiera muerto...

HOMBRE 1: Alguien lo habría matado. (1091-2)

The hope of the people is dying like their hero Francisco Villa. The last scenes of *La madrugada* are as much a requiem for the present as it is for the tragic hero of the play.

On the stage there is neither light nor hope as the tragic destiny of Villa and the people he defended has been fulfilled. Nonetheless, the people and the land are not condemned to failure. As Féral reminds us “la fuerza del teatro, pero también su contradicción profunda, es que no puede sobrevivir si no es negando la memoria como

memoria cualquiera de sus formas. En él la memoria ya no es signo del pasado. Se ha convertido en presente” (25). By making present on stage the lies and the deception with which the crime was conceived and carried out that day in Parral, Tovar connects the death of Villa with contemporary Mexico, representing a stagnant world enveloped in the darkness of a lie. Through the action on the stage and various intertextual references, the audience is called to action by activating collective memory and collective struggles. The lies that envelop the assassination of Villa serve as an allegory for all kinds of abuses committed by those who affirm to carry on his ideals. The final lines of the play testify to the steep price for all the rancor and deception brought on by Pancho Villa’s tragedy. In the final dialogue of the play, the woman, standing in for Luz Corral and the people, confronts the dead earth and, by extension, the audience:

Tierra ingrata que das estos hombres enconados y cobardes, ¿qué aire te ha de templar, qué lluvia te lava el rencor? Traicionas, encadenas, sacrificas; y todo es tu esperanza malograda, sin nombre que le toque ni bendición que le alcance. ¿Qué lumbre, alma mía, quema tu ausencia? (Pausa.) Me dijo que estaría aquí a la salida del sol... (1092).

There is still memory and *corridos* are still sung to this day. As the play closes, the double meaning of the title *La madrugada* is made apparent. On one morning a hero was murdered along with the hope he inspired. Like the circular structure of the play, there will be another day when the truth will be revealed because the darkest of nights always lead to a new dawn.

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